



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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October 12, 2004

TO: Chief School Administrator
Special Education Director
Administrator of a Charter School
Administrator of a State Facility

FROM: Barbara Gantwerk, Director
Office of Special Education Programs

SUBJECT: Assignment of Grade Levels

For a number of years, the Department of Education has required districts to assign grade levels to students with disabilities who are placed in ungraded programs (self-contained classes) to facilitate the participation of these students in the statewide testing system at grades 3, 4, 8 and 11. The Office of Special Education Programs is extending this practice to all students with disabilities who are placed in ungraded programs in years when statewide testing is not required. The assignment of grade levels will assist in tracking students with disabilities as they progress from year to year in their school programs; in making the necessary determinations of the appropriate times for participation in district-wide testing programs; and determining the appropriate times for transition from elementary school programs to middle school programs and high school programs. Additionally, the assignment of a grade level will facilitate the accurate reporting of required data under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

School districts may adopt the same plan that is currently in use to determine when students with disabilities must participate in the statewide testing system. This plan is based on the school year, which begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. If the student turns the designated age anytime in the school year he or she would be assigned the corresponding grade as follows:

If the student turns age:

The grade level assignment would be:

6	kindergarten
7	grade 1
8	grade 2
9	grade 3
10	grade 4
11	grade 5
12	grade 6

If the student turns age:

The grade level assignment would be:

13	grade 7
14	grade 8
15	grade 9
16	grade 10
17	grade 11
18	grade 12

Districts may develop other plans for assigning grade levels. Another option might be to establish a threshold age and cutoff date during the school year. For example, the student must turn age five by September 30 of the school year to be eligible for kindergarten; age six for first grade and so on. For students with disabilities ages 19, 20 and 21, districts may assign 11th grade/12th grades as repeated. It is important to note that whatever plan the district adopts, the age range and grade level should not exceed the age cutoffs for participation in the statewide assessment at grades 3, 4, 8 and 11.

It is also important to distinguish the student's assigned grade level from the student's level of performance. The two are not the same. Again, the purpose of assigning a grade level is to ensure that students with disabilities are being tested and are transitioning at the appropriate times regardless of their level of performance. The student's program and placement continue to be determined by the IEP team. Students with disabilities in self-contained classes may be retained in a grade or advanced to a higher grade as all other students.

We are asking that districts assign grades to their students with disabilities as soon as possible, not only to facilitate appropriate decision-making for transitions and participation in statewide testing, but to ensure that our statewide data are as accurate as possible. Beginning with the 2004 Fall Survey, districts will be required to report all students with disabilities by grade level.

Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated.

BG/CK

c: Members, State Board of Education

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